

VZCZCXRO7050
RR RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHIHL RUEHKUK
DE RUEHGB #4778/01 3640136
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
R 300136Z DEC 06
FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 8856
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 004778

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/24/2016
TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINS](#) [KJUS](#) [KPAO](#) [US](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: IRAQI KURDISTAN MINISTER OF HUMAN RIGHTS
ACKNOWLEDGES ABUSES

Classified By: Regional Coordinator James Yellin for reason 1.4 (d).

This is a Kurdistan Regional Reconstruction Team (RRT) cable.

11. (C) SUMMARY: Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) Minister of Human Rights, Yousif Mohammad Aziz, admitted an imperfect human rights record in a meeting with Regional Coordinator and RRTOffs on December 18. Minister Aziz acknowledged physical abuse in prisons, failure to release prisoners after the completion of their sentence, and intimidation of independent journalists. He said the Ministry of Human Rights performs an advocacy role by bringing complaints to the ministries of justice and interior, and by raising public awareness of human rights protections. He also requested technical assistance in developing laws for the protection of human rights and press freedoms. END SUMMARY.

POLICING AND CORRECTIONS REMAINS DECENTRALIZED

12. (SBU) RRTOffs met in Erbil with Yousif Mohammad Aziz, KRG Minister of Human Rights, on December 18, who said his ministry acts as an advocate for human rights within the government and conducts public awareness campaigns. He added that the Ministry of Human Rights investigates complaints against other government ministries, such as the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Interior, but the legal framework for the protection of human rights is the domain of the Ministry of Justice, while policing and public security fall to the Ministry of Interior. Finally, the Ministries of Justice and Interior operate their own prisons.

13. (SBU) COMMENT: The Ministries of Justice and Interior are two of four government ministries that were not merged when the KDP and PUK parties agreed to form a unified regional government in January 2006. As a result, the parties each maintain separate Ministries of Justice and Interior which operate in their respective regional strongholds, complicating the ability of the KRG to monitor and maintain uniform protections for human rights. END COMMENT.

TORTURE PERSISTS BUT IS NOT SYSTEMIC

14. (C) Regional Coordinator inquired about the role of the Ministry of Human Rights in supervising conditions in KRG prisons. Aziz explained that Ministry officials visit prisons in the region bi-weekly. ICRC and international NGOs such as Human Rights Watch also make periodic visits and are welcomed. According to Aziz, officials have uncovered cases of prisoner beatings and torture, but this is limited to individual prison guards and is not a systematic government or corrections policy. Aziz avoided answering questions on the treatment of prisoners in clandestine secret prisons run by KDP and PUK security forces. He said the Ministry only handles prisons that are officially registered.

15. (C) Aziz also said the corrections systems frequently

keeps prisoners incarcerated beyond the completion of their sentence. Sometimes this is due to an assessment that the prisoner is likely to face private retaliation for his crime upon release. In many other cases this is because the system lacks personnel and resources (e.g. parole officers) to properly administer prisoner release programs.

FREEDOM OF THE PRESS &GOOD, BUT NOT VERY GOOD8

¶6. (C) Regional Coordinator inquired about protections for press freedoms, citing the arrest of several prominent journalists in the region for criticism of KRG and party officials. The Minister, a PUK member from Dohuk province, said KDP officials were responsible for the most severe cases and quickly asserted that all the journalists had been released. He said that while press freedom in the region is not perfect, it had improved since the Saddam era. &I cannot tell you that it,s very good, but it,s good,8 he said. He added, &We cannot make a switch from Saddam to democracy in a matter of days.8

¶7. (U) Background on Press Freedom: Kamal Sayed Qadir, an Iraqi-Austrian dual national of Kurdish decent was arrested and sentenced to 30-years in prison in the fall of 2005 for criticizing KRG Prime Minister Masoud Barzani and other KDP officials for corruption. He was released only after the Austrian government and UN officials interceded. Earlier this year Sulaimaniyah-based journalist Hawez Hawezi was detained for 4-days and beaten by PUK security forces after publishing an article pointing to corruption in the PUK. After a second detention for a follow-up story, Hawezi left Iraq to seek refugee status with the UN in neighboring Syria.

¶8. (C) Tawana Osman, editor-in-chief of Sulaimaniyah-based

BAGHDAD 00004778 002 OF 002

independent weekly Hawlati (The Citizen) independent daily recounted in a meeting with RRT PAO five cases in the last year in which he defended his publication for investigative reports on topics such as food and vaccination theft by public officials and drug abuse by Kurdish celebrities, receiving a six-month suspended sentence in one case. The publication has hired a lawyer who does a final editorial &scrub8 before publication pointing out stories government officials may find objectionable. End Background.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR ASSISTANCE

¶9. (U) The Minister said he would welcome assistance from the United States to improve the legal framework for human rights protections in the region, especially in drafting and administering human rights codes and a press law. He stressed that this work should be done in conjunction with the Kurdistan National Assembly (KNA) committee on Human Rights and the Ministries of Justice and Interior. Regional Coordinator replied that he would look into what might be done to help.

SCOBey